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2002 Wisconsin Gun Deer
Season Opening Day Report

Edited by Paul Holtan
Wisconsin DNR
PO Box 7921
Madison WI 53707-7921
(608) 267-7517
fax: (608) 264-6293
e-mail: holtap@dnr.state.wi.us
World Wide Web:
<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>

Hunters enjoy ideal conditions for opening of Wisconsin 2002 nine-day deer season

MADISON -- Early opening day conditions were nearly ideal Saturday as hunters headed to the woods for the start of Wisconsin's traditional nine-day deer hunting season. Many deer registrations stations reported good hunter success, with bucks -- in the north big bucks -- outnumbering does.

Hunters were apparently fairly confident about their deer, because in some areas of the state, chronic wasting disease sample collection sites were going begging for samples. Other sampling stations reported they were about on target for the number of samples they hoped to collect opening weekend.

John Weiland, a hunter from Brick, N.J., brought in 10 deer shortly after noon to the Arena sampling station. He is part of a group of eight hunters that have been coming to the Spring Green area on and off for eight years. Weiland said hunting conditions Saturday morning were "fabulous, beautiful scenery and (we) saw a lot of deer." Weiland and his party took nine antlerless deer and one "big, very old buck." He said he and his party would keep all the deer except the "tough old buck" and would butcher them according to Agriculture guidelines Saturday afternoon.

Weiland commented that Wisconsin was very fortunate to have the deer herd and hunting opportunities it does, and he said he wanted to tell Wisconsin hunters to, "Get out and hunt. Now is the time to do your job as a conservationist if you value keeping hunting as a tradition. Do what you have to do -- especially if you are from Wisconsin," he said.

Tom Hauge, director of wildlife management for the state Department of Natural Resources said he was not surprised to hear that some CWD sampling were off to a slow start. "This has been like a typical deer season in one sense: We had a cold weather day for the opening and there was no rush for hunters to register their deer."

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But other than that, Hauge added, “there has been nothing usual about this deer season because we’ve dealt with the CWD uncertainty all year long.”

Hauge said he was hoping most stations would see an evening rush, as often happens in colder weather years. “Hunters are creatures of habit, as many demonstrated yesterday waiting for the last minute to purchase their licenses.” The agency reported that about 70,000 licenses were sold on Friday, the last day before the season, which represents about 11 percent of license sales for the year so far.

“We are glad hunters are out hunting and keeping their deer. But the fact is, we STILL need deer samples,” Hauge said. “We are attempting the biggest deer herd health assessment ever. It will yield critical information on where CWD does and does not exist in the state and help in our fight against the disease. But many collection sites report hunters are registering their deer and passing them by. We need 500 deer per county to get a good statistical sample. We are hoping Sunday will bring the samples we need,” he said.

Hauge noted that DNR has mounted a tremendous effort to staff collection and processing centers. More than 1,200 DNR and other volunteers are staffing the collection and processing centers over the weekend. He noted that DNR could not sustain those numbers of staff for long and it was critical to get samples in.

“I want to thank those hunters who do bring their deer in to be sampled for being on the front line in this conservation battle. They stepped up to the bat despite all the uncertainty,” he said.

Many deer registration stations reported hunters were bringing in nice-sized bucks, many with good antler development, which indicates good overall health in the state’s deer herd. DNR wildlife biologists working registration stations said that may have been another factor in hunter’s not bringing in deer to be sampled, as many hunters want to keep the heads in tact for mounting.

Proud father Troy Ringelstetter had three young hunters in his party of nine. Two did very well. David Schrosfer, 14, got a 10-point buck. Justin Schell, 13, took a very large doe. Ringelstetter, his son Austin, 11, just graduated from hunter education class, and the rest of the party registered the deer at lunch and they intended to go back out, buck tags in hand. They hunt in Sauk County near the river, and all are from Sauk City. They said they intended to keep the venison and enjoy it. Said Ringelstetter, “Hunters should hunt deer and listen for every scrap of information they can about CWD and then analyze and make a decision for themselves on using the meat.”

Hunters were greeted with very good hunting conditions, with clear skies over much of the state for the opening, and temperatures ranging in the mid 20s to mid 30s across the state. Winds picked up especially in the north by noon, with gusts reported ranging from 15 to 30 miles per hour. Areas of far northern Wisconsin such as Ashland, Douglas, Vilas, Sawyer and Florence counties reported a dusting of snow fell on the ground Friday night, but most of that was melting by mid-day.

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Hunting License Sales Finish Strong

Hunters responded to calls to get out and hunt with a last minute assault on hunting license outlets. After deer hunting licenses sales being down as much as 30 percent earlier in the year, by the end of deer gun license sales at midnight on Friday, sales had rebounded and were off only 10 per cent from 2001.

“We asked hunters for help and they responded,” said DNR Secretary Darrell Bazzell. “Hunting is our single most effective wildlife management tool. At 1.6 million, we have too many deer in Wisconsin and we needed help trimming the herd to prevent disease spread, and we got it. We are very grateful,” he said.

By the close of sales, DNR sold 618,945 gun deer licenses compared with 688,540 in 2001.

According to Marilyn Davis, DNR Licensing director, DNR sold 37 percent of its deer licenses in the seven days before the start of the Gun Deer Season. “When I saw the pace of sales on Friday, 100 license sales transactions a minute, I couldn’t believe it. I was holding my breath that the system would perform, and it did perform well. We sold 11 percent of the season’s licenses on Friday alone, nearly 70,000 licenses in one day,” she said.

As usual, the largest influx of out of state hunters was from Minnesota, with 13,734 licenses sold to hunters from that state. Illinois was second, with 7,815. This season saw hunters from every state in the union, even Hawaii and Alaska.

Hunters came from all age groups, but it is interesting to note that more than 3,000 hunters 80 years old and older were out in the fields and woods hunting.

More licenses -- 30,416 -- were sold in Dane County near the Intensive Harvest Zone than any other county. Other counties selling more than 20,000 licenses included Brown, Marathon, Milwaukee, Outagamie, Washington, and Waukesha. About 7 percent of licenses were purchased by women.

Opening day marred by fatal and other accidents

Opening day was marred by a number of hunting incidents. In Sawyer County one man died from a self-inflicted gunshot, apparently during a tree stand incident. In Oneida County a 14-year-old youth apparently seriously injured himself in another tree-stand-related incident. In Lafayette County, a man was shot and seriously injured in a hunting party accident. In Outagamie County, a 44-year-old hunter was shot when a bullet ricocheted off the chair he was sitting on and hit him in the thigh. There were reports from Dun, Lincoln and Vilas counties of hunters being shot in the hand. In Green County, a man was shot in the arm during a deer drive.

Hunter Safety Administrator Tim Lawhern reminds hunters to keep safety in mind at all times.

“If you are hunting alone, be sure someone knows where you are and when you will return. If you are hunting in a group, plan out where each of you will be and be aware of where your hunting partners are at all times. Wear blaze orange – even when you are dressing out your deer. And remember the four maxims of safe firearm handling: Treat every gun as if it was loaded. Always point your muzzle in a safe direction. Be certain of your target and what lies beyond it and keep your finger off the trigger until you’re ready to shoot,” Lawhern said.

Lawhern said that accidents can happen when hunters are getting into and out of tree stands. “Always unload your gun before getting in or out of your stand, and use a rope to pull your gun up or lower it down, making sure the safety is on,” he said.

NORTHERN REGION

Ashland County

Ashland - Todd Naas, DNR wildlife biologist at Ashland reported that it had been steady but not real busy. About 35 deer had been agency by 1:30 p.m. There were on and off snow showers but no snow had accumulated. It was windy, but out of the wind the temperature wasn't too bad. One deer registered had a 21-inch inside spread. "Most of the people in this part of the state aren't too concerned about CWD," Naas said. "We've had a hard time convincing people to take their deer to the sampling station."

Barron County

Cumberland - Cheri Bents of Gabby's Gas and Deli said things have been steady but the big rush doesn't come in until after dark. There have been some real nice bucks with good antler growth registered so far. Some hunters were taking deer to get tested, but "most don't want to bother, and the sampling station is only about two blocks away," she said.

Turtle Lake - Ted Loenser of Lake Country Sports said he had mostly small bucks, a lot of four and six pointers and just a few larger bucks brought in. About a quarter of the deer brought in have been does. It was nice and sunny early, but it turned really windy and cloudy so things slowed down. Only a couple of people have asked about getting their deer tested.

Bayfield County

Washburn - Activity was steady at the DNR Ranger Station in Washburn, which was a CWD sampling station. DNR wildlife manager Tim Davis said the opening of the regular day was going better than the early Zone T season as far as people providing deer to be sampled. "Most hunters don't seem to be concerned one way or another, but they are willing to help out with the effort," Davis said. The station had sampled about 30 deer by 1:45 p.m. Most people are willing to offer deer heads. "The ones that we haven't been able to take have been nice bucks with good racks," Davis said. Antler growth was good this year. People are more curious about the CWD tests than they are concerned, he said.

Barnes - They have been trickling in one or two at a time, but once darkness falls parking lot is going to be loaded. No exceptional deer were registered, but a few eight-pointers were. By 2:30 p.m. 48 deer were registered including quite a few doe. Lisa Puckett at Jim's Bait Shop said the sampling station two miles down the road "sent someone up to ask us to send more people down, but we have signs posted up all over and I'm not sure what more I can do."

Burnett County

Grantsburg - At Crex Meadows, DNR Wildlife Biologist Jim Hoefler said things have been going pretty good, with close to 40 deer heads collected by 3 p.m. "There really hasn't been much talk about CWD," he said. The station was getting mostly bucks, and only a handful of deer came in that were older than a year-and-a-half. "We have had a couple nice eight and 10 point bucks." Weather was good. Wind has been picking up to about 15 mph at times.

Spooner - Gary Haas of A & H Country Market said it "feels a little bit slow right now." He had registered 33 does and 22 bucks by 2:45. "Hunters are saying they are not seeing much in the afternoon. There is a 30 mile-an-hour wind blowing. We don't really start picking up until about 4 o'clock. We process deer too, and we're not seeing any drop at all. Only a couple of hunters have even asked about it (CWD). We've been doing this for 16 years. He had registered four nice eight pointers and a 10 pointer. Some of the bucks still show signs of being in rut with swollen necks.

Douglas County

Solin Springs - Greg Kessler, DNR wildlife biologist, said only 31 animals were registered by 3 p.m. compared to about 50 to 60 animals the past couple years, which were phenomenal years. "For one, we're down in deer numbers; two, there are fewer hunters; three, it's the tail end of the rut and hunters are saying they are not seeing as many deer." They had not seen any outstanding bucks, just a couple of nice ones but nothing exceptional. "In this area it was more back to what we would have considered a normal year a few years ago," he said. Only two or three hunters have even asked about CWD testing and indicated they were going to bring deer down the 10 to 12 miles they'd have to travel to get their deer tested. "This morning was very good hunting conditions. Wind has picked up a bit, but not bad. There was just a dusting of snow on the ground, which will help for tracking and for seeing deer."

Florence County

Florence Natural Resource Center - Henry Sullivan, DNR forester, said some guys came in and watched the CWD video, but collections were slow. Sampled 20 deer by early afternoon. "Most hunters just want to help out," he said. One group that came in had a 12-pointer, a fork and a six pointer. Both both smaller bucks were submitted for testing. Hunters are saying they are seeing a lot of deer. Not too cold. Light snow cover -- good for tracking.

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Forest County

Crandon - Bill Millis, DNR forester said only five deer had come in for CWD sampling by 3 p.m. The registration station down the road had 27 deer a couple hours ago. "Hunters aren't even willing to make the two-minute drive" to have deer tested, he said. All the hunters said they were going back out. The wind had really picked up, temperatures were cold and a trace of snow was on the ground.

Langlade County

Elcho - Things were about average at the Elcho Shell Station, said station worker Kelly Johnson. "We had a total of 70 with more bucks than does. There was a nice 12-pointer this morning and then since then mostly six and eight pointers. One hunter said that he shot a doe and didn't see there was a buck right next to it and it ran off before he could get it." A lot of hunters were interested in having their deer tested for CWD, because the sampling station was just across the road, she added.

Lincoln County

Merrill - Mike Willman, a DNR parks employee who has been working registration stations for 33 years said things were behind normal. Last year the station registered 500 deer on Saturday and by 4 p.m. there were about 275 deer this year. "About half the people who come in have been interested in donating heads," he said. He had registered some very nice bucks, with many nice 10 and 12 pointers. Hunters report deer are moving. Bucks were still chasing does. Willman said he registered a buck that had lost an eye sparring with another deer, and that buck was one of three bucks still chasing a doe. "That tells you something about the stamina of those animals." Hunters were also saying deer are really dispersed. "We just registered four deer that were shot in the cornfield. We're hearing from hunters that they like the ban on baiting because the deer are out and foraging and not sitting on bait piles." The station had also seen some unusual palmated racks. Antler growth is very good with racks very thick. "We've aged two 6 to 8 year bucks and several does in the 6-year-age class."

Oneida County

DNR Wildlife Manger Ron Eckstein said Rhinelander and Eagle River CWD sampling stations were both doing very well. "We'll make the amount of deer for today at these stations for what we thought we should have. Contrary to my expectations the hunters are donating the heads of their bucks. I'd say 60 percent of the deer sampled have been bucks." A lot of nice bucks have come in, he added. Hunters said they were seeing a lot of deer. Very few antlerless deer were brought in. Weather was great today. It was 30 degrees at 7 a.m. and calm. By noon, temperatures dropped and the wind picked up.

Polk County

St. Croix Falls - Dustin Ardolf of St. Croix Outdoors said it had been pretty busy, with about 30 deer, mostly bucks, registered by early afternoon. "Some hunters are saying they are seeing a lot of deer out running but others have said they haven't seen any. We're not hearing much from hunters at all about CWD."

Price County

Park Falls - Tim, the owner of Bridge Bait and Tackle, had registered 79 deer by Saturday afternoon. "Every year is different. This year was entirely different. Especially with the bait ban and the CWD." Buck registrations were running about two-to-one. "We've seen some very heavy racks. One 13-pointer, several 12 pointers." The station was also a CWD sampling station. Hunters have given about 21-22 heads so far today, but hunters have been a little reluctant to donate, especially those with nice bucks."

Sawyer County

Hayward - Lori Good of Ma Good's Store reported things had been pretty slow Saturday during the day, but that site doesn't get really busy until 6 to 8 p.m.. "We're out in the country and there's been a doe hanging out in the field across the street. So I guess it's been a bit slow. We haven't had a lot of bucks, but we did have a nice 10-pointer that was still in rut." Hunters haven't been asking about CWD, they just don't seem to be concerned about it, she said. They registered 40 deer by 4 p.m. Last year they had 96 deer on Saturday. There is a dusting of snow on the ground, so it's good for tracking.

Vilas County

Boulder Junction - Dean Long at Long's Service Station said it has been slower than last year. Things were picking up at 4:30 p.m. He registered 45 bucks and 40 does. "Hunters all seem to be happy. We had a good dusting of snow last night. Most of the hunters up here are not worried about CWD. I've had some hunters that come up here every year and they are glad because they don't have to worry about it." A lot of real nice 8 pointers were brought in and just a few spiked bucks. "I think it's been one of the bigger year for rack size."

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NORTHEAST REGION

Both registration stations and CWD collection sites offered a mixed report of activity as of late afternoon opening day. Registrations were steady but strong today in parts of the region, with a heavy buck kill in some areas, but in other parts of the region, registrations were lower than previous years. Mid-afternoon reports (3 p.m.) of CWD collections varied from 10 to 15 heads at stations close to urban areas (Brown and Manitowoc Counties) to 25 to 40-plus heads in more rural areas (Kewaunee, Oconto, Shawano and Winnebago Counties). Several stations reported lots of fawns and head-shot deer (Maribel). Hunters are reminded that fawns and head-shot deer cannot be accepted for CWD testing. Other stations reported seeing lot of bucks and some stations encountered hunters reluctant to give up deer heads with big racks. On the other hand, the Luxemburg collection station in Kewaunee County reported 95 percent bucks turned in with antlers and skull plates sawn off. All collection stations reported becoming busy around 4 p.m. Meanwhile, the CWD Processing Lab at DNR Northeast Region headquarters in Green Bay received its first opening-day shipment of deer heads, and the volunteers responsible for the extraction process were busy. They plan to process deer heads "until they just can't do another one." A total of 885 deer heads had been collected for CWD testing as of 4:45 p.m. today.

Brown County

Green Bay - At the Lineville Travelmart 15 bucks and seven doe were registered between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m., which was more than last year's opening day at that hour. Weather was sunny but cold and windy. DNR staff were in the parking lot collecting CWD samples.

Calumet County

Kiel - At Mike's Bait and Gun, 59 deer were registered by early afternoon, including 26 does -- numbers are comparable to last year's. Jo Anne Klaeser has been registering deer here for 14 years and keeps annual records. Last year this station registered 154 at the end of opening day; their biggest opening day was 1997 with 177 deer registered. Weather conditions today were sunny, cold and windy. Klaeser said she has been encouraging hunters to get their deer tested down the block for CWD, but only about 10 hunters who had registered deer so far planned to take their deer there for testing. Many who shot bucks didn't want to get them sampled. Hunters seemed happy because it was colder outside than last year and generally they were not worried about CWD. License sales were holding steady, according to Klaeser; she noticed no decline from other years, and bonus tag sales were brisk. She had sold 1,700 bonus tags since Nov. 13. She expected registrations to pick up again later today.

Door County

Egg Harbor - Paul Peeters, DNR fisheries biologist, was running the CWD sampling station at the Mueller Mini-mart. So far 58 deer had been registered by early afternoon compared to a total of 109 on opening day last year -- about the same rate, Peeters said. Some large deer with large antlers had been brought in. Hunters with does were "fairly willing" to donate heads for CWD testing. Buck hunters were a little more reluctant, though a number of hunters with smaller bucks did get their deer sampled. Seventeen deer had been sampled for CWD so far. A few fawns and head-shot deer were brought and couldn't be sampled. Weather changed to overcast in the early afternoon, and the wind picked up.

Fond du Lac County

Ripon - At the Holiday Food and Sports Station, 37 bucks and 26 does were registered by early afternoon. Weather was nice -- sunny, not too cold.

Green Lake County

Markesan - At the Grand River Convenience Store, more than 100 deer were registered by mid-afternoon -- steady but not as busy as last year's opening day when more than 500 deer were registered by day's end. About 25-30 deer had been sampled so far for CWD, according to Aaron McCullough, Wautoma wildlife technician. Mostly bucks were being tested; one hunter brought in a head he removed from a deer he shot but not enough of the neck was left so it couldn't be sampled. Hunters offering heads for sampling said they were interested in "helping out the state and would help spread the word" to encourage other hunters to bring their deer in for sampling, McCullough said. Some hunters brought big bucks in for sampling and just cut the antlers loose to keep.

Manitowoc County

Maribel - At Greenwood's, 58 deer had been registered by mid-afternoon including 29 bucks. Last year 127 deer were registered there; more deer were expected to come in this evening. Conditions this morning were "perfect" according to the manager -- no wind and a light dusting of snow. Photos of six big bucks were taken at Greenwood's and posted on the wall already today, where the photos remain displayed year-round. The DNR was collecting heads for CWD sampling in a nearby tent; 10-12 heads had been collected so far. Many deer were shot in head and couldn't be sampled.

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Marinette County

Wausauke - At the Amoco Plus, 38 heads were collected so far for CWD testing, and more than 100 deer had been registered by mid-afternoon.

Crivitz - T and T Fermanich Mobile had registered 110 bucks and 60 doe so far, about the same rate as last year when they registered 445 on opening day. CWD volunteer Cindy Brandt of the DNR Air Management Program in Eau Claire said that this morning, only about one out of 10 deer were being sampled, but the proportion improved later. About 40 deer had been sampled so far, mostly bucks. Most hunters were keeping the skullcaps with antlers. Brandt said "hunters are very happy to help" with the CWD testing, and "not especially concerned about CWD."

Marquette County

Westfield - At the Pioneer Mini-store, Jim Radtke, DNR wildlife technician, Berlin, said 33 heads had been collected so far for CWD testing, which was better than sample numbers taken for the October Zone T antlerless deer hunt. A total of 57 bucks and 28 does had been registered so far, a bit lower than previous years. Mostly bucks were being sampled for CWD; hunters often kept the antlers, Radtke said.

Oconto County

Suring - The Quick Food Mart registered 70 deer by mid-afternoon, mostly bucks. Weather was cool and windy with a little snow cover this morning.

Oconto - Registrations at the Oconto Fire Department were much lower than last year, when 200 were registered opening day. By mid-afternoon, only 75 deer had been registered, including 53 bucks. A few trophy bucks came in with 10- and 12-point racks; most of the bucks were six-pointers.

Outagamie County

Black Creek - Registrations were down at the Bow Hunter's Shop with only 15 bucks and seven does registered by mid-afternoon, but this could be because hunters were taking deer to CWD sampling sites instead for registration (nearest CWD sampling site is Shiocton). Hunters who stopped in said the woods were quiet this year though the weather was beautiful. Business at the Bow Hunter's Shop is down too.

Shiocton - At Colwitz's Convenience Store, Bobbi Winebar of the DNR wildlife program was aging deer and sending hunters across the road to get their deer sampled for CWD. So far 134 deer had been registered, including 88 bucks. About 30 heads had been sampled so far. Many hunters didn't want their deer tested, Winebar said, because they like to keep the heads on for easier skinning. The weather was really nice today, sunny and not too cold.

Shawano County

Shawano - Registration was busy at Qualheim's True Value, with 50 deer registered by mid-afternoon and about 35 heads sampled for CWD. One huge buck was brought in that looked like it weighed about 240 lbs. The hunters who brought this deer in bought three disposable cameras from Qualheim's and took pictures of the huge animal. Hunters were in good moods and very cooperative with CWD sampling.

Waupaca County

Iola - At JR's Sport Shop, 150 deer had been registered by mid-afternoon -- about 50-50 bucks and does. Most bucks were two-and-a-half year olds; bigger bucks had been brought in when bow season was open. Hunters said they saw a lot of deer this morning, but then the wind picked up and that slowed hunting and registrations a bit. Registrations were comparable to last year, which totaled 380; more deer expected later. Most hunters were willing to give deer heads for CWD sampling -- probably about half of the deer were sampled for CWD. Some first-time hunters brought in their first deer.

Waushara County

Hancock - The Hancock Mini-Mart reported registration numbers were down a lot from last year, but more deer were expected later today. Twenty-eight bucks and 21 does had been taken so far. Hunters said they weren't seeing as many deer today.

Winnebago County

Omro - The Omro Store registered 34 deer by mid-afternoon -- was down from last year for unknown reasons. Registered more than 80 last year on opening day. Mostly bucks were registered today.

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SOUTHEASTERN REGION

Kenosha County

Bassett - Though the weather was nice for hunting, only two does were registered at the Bassett Hound Station by 1:30 p.m.

Kansasville, Bong State Recreation Area - Bong State Recreation Area registered one car-killed deer during its eight hours of operation today. The managed deer hunt at Bong opened at 6 a.m. and ended at 2 p.m. "All hunting has been slow this year," Brian Campus said, comparing it to other managed hunts such as pheasant. A total of 12 deer hunters were seen in the recreation area today.

Paddock Lake - Paddock Lake Sporting Goods registered eight deer. Four of the eight were bucks, three were doe fawns and one was a buck fawn. Only one of the adult bucks was volunteered to the DNR for testing. According to Randy Rogness, store manager, hunters were not volunteering heads for sampling because they want to have them mounted, or because they arrived at the sample collection station before it opened. The sample collection station at this site had limited hours of operation, opening at 1 p.m. and closing at 4 p.m. Based on conversations Rogness had with hunters, CWD has not been a huge concern there. "Most people are getting the gang together and going hunting as they always have," Rogness said. He added that a windy morning may have kept hunter numbers down.

Sheboygan County

Sheboygan - Approximately 30 deer were registered by 2:30 p.m. Miesfeld's Market was the only registration station contacted in the southeastern region of state that saw no decline in deer registration numbers compared to previous years. Tracy Messner, whose safe butchering skills were showcased in the Sheboygan Conservation Association's deer processing video "From Field to Freezer," believes that his registration station has received a steady flow of deer for two reasons: the community recognizes and trusts him because of his participation in the SCCA video, and, Messner said, "Wives that have traditionally cut up deer their husbands brought home themselves, are now willing to pay to have a professional do it." They find comfort in paying \$65 to have a professional remove the lymph nodes and other body parts they have been told to avoid, he said. Two years ago, Messner started a double identification system to ensure that every person receives only the meat from the animal they brought in. This tracking system was not installed because of meat safety issues, but rather to expel a myth that processors keep a portion of meat from every animal that's brought in. For many years Messner has been processing deer and elk from western states that have known infections of CWD their herds. Until now, he has never taken extra precautions in handling venison. "I am not concerned," he said. "I have never cut across bone and or any other part that contains the disease." Today Messner received 18 deer to skin and process; nine were tested for CWD. To make the process run smoothly, Messner decided with DNR staff to first skin the registered deer to be tested and then remove the head. He then gives the head back to the DNR for processing. He uses one designated saw to remove heads. After each head is removed, an inch of meat around the neck is cut off to get rid of possible contamination. "I trim a little area away from the neck after I remove the head," Messner said. People don't complain about losing this neck meat, but are rather pacified by knowing that their meat is safe."

Waukesha County

Monches - Sue Kratz at the Monches Hilltop Inn registered 16 deer by 2:30 p.m. -- three does and 12 bucks. Most deer registered had heads volunteered for CWD testing. Kratz, who has registered deer at this station for seven to eight years, doesn't think the slow pace is associated with CWD. "Hunters are concerned about the disease and have questions, but it's not stopping them from hunting," she said.

Ozaukee

Saukville - Kathleen Wolski, DNR public affairs manager, reported from Saukville Meats that she has seen good hunter cooperation during opening day. Wolski said that hunters who submitted heads to the DNR for CWD testing are not concerned about the length of time it may take to receive results. When one hunter was told he may not receive results until March 31, he responded, "I will have it eaten by then," Wolski said. One concern hunters are having in the area is that some meat processors have decided not to make sausage out of trim meat from deer that have had their head removed for testing. In these circumstances, hunters are asked to take their trim meat home, freeze it and wait for results. If the results come back negative, then the processors will be willing to make sausage from it. If a whole carcass is submitted to these processors, they are willing to make sausage from the meat on the spot.

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SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Columbia County

Fall River -- 98 deer had already been registered by 1:45 p.m. -- the same steady pace as last year when 244 were registered opening day. All but two hunters agreed to have their deer sampled for CWD and collections were handled "quickly and efficiently." The station reported an even split of registered bucks and does. Quite a few of the deer were nice, heavy-bodied animals though the biggest rack seen thus far was a 10-pointer.

Wisconsin Dells -- Ben Tucker, station manager at Interstate Amoco in Wisconsin Dells said the station registered 60 deer by early afternoon Saturday. Registration and CWD sampling were efficient with no unusual delays. Most hunters are taking the opportunity to have their deer tested for CWD.

Poynette -- Paul Elsing at the Amoco Food Shop registration site said about 100 deer were registered by early afternoon. A lot of people have been registering does, and many are small, because hunters want to receive their Earn-A-Buck permit.

Portage -- Sharpshooter's registered 65 deer by mid-afternoon. "We've seen a lot of big bucks," noted Nick Zanon at the Sharpshooter's registration station. "It's amazing that several people said they only saw one deer and it was a big buck. At least 10 people who have come through this afternoon intend to mount their deer this year because the racks are nice, big inside spreads of 15-20 inches and the deer are big and healthy." Zanon reports one family of a grandfather, father and son, who was out on his first deer hunt, all registered nice bucks today. Zanon said 75-80 percent of hunters are choosing to have their deer sampled for CWD. "As an incentive, we are also offering a \$7.50 discount certificate for dinner to anyone agreeing to have their deer sampled for CWD."

Crawford County

Gays Mills -- Courtney DuCharme registered 31 deer by mid afternoon -- 15 does and 16 bucks, including two really nice 10-pointers.

Prairie du Chien -- Karen Hertramps here registered 25 bucks and 21 does, about average for this time of day. CWD sampling is going smoothly and takes only about four to five minutes, "and the collection staff is friendly and efficient."

Eastman -- At Chub's and Terri's Bar, Andy Stluka said "We've only registered 16 deer today, but around here they don't start piling in here until about 6 p.m." People know where they can have CWD sampling done because there is a sign here showing the nearest sites.

Dane County

McFarland -- Jill Rosenberg at J's Roadside Tavern said only 15 deer had been registered. Many were too young for CWD sampling, but people wanted their Earn-A-Buck permits. Sampling for disease testing has been going well; each deer takes less than five minutes to sample.

Marshall -- John Carthew at Spirits, Etc. said they'd registered about 18 deer, mostly does.

Belleville -- About 35 deer were registered, probably 4:1 does to bucks, but that may be hunters wanting to get their "earn-a-buck" permit. "We saw a lot of little does and one really nice buck about 140 pound 8-pointer. Most hunters here have not chosen to have their deer tested for CWD," said Tim Scott at Belleville Sugar River Sports. "They just don't see it as a significant problem. It's been pretty quiet. From my own hunt this morning, I'd say we're not getting as much hunting pressure down here. I didn't hear nearly as much shooting as I usually do and I don't know whether to attribute that to the fact that we have a much longer season this year or that guys are just waiting a little longer to get out and hunt."

Black Earth - Opening hunting conditions in the Black Earth area were cold, with partly cloudy skies, a brisk wind and no snow on the ground. Hunters at the collection site reported seeing a lot of deer moving around. One hunter commented, "I don't know, maybe this banning baiting thing isn't all bad." Tim Rogers, a student at Mt. Horeb High School, shot three does and brought them in to the collection site by 10:30 a.m. He said he and his family planned to keep the meat and check the Web site for test results. He also noted that, after the Badger game, he would be out hunting again, three buck tags in hand, and this time he was going for a trophy. Zack Zweifel, hunting deer his first time after passing his hunter safety course, shot what he thought was a very large doe while muzzle loader hunting near Mt. Horeb. On close inspection, the deer turned out to be a large buck that had already lost its antlers. DNR biologists looked the deer over and scratched their heads; the horns had been recently lost but did not appear shot off. Zweifel said he would keep the deer and wait for results. Ahren Locke of Madison brought in his fourth deer from the Intensive Harvest Zone. When asked about his hunt, he said, "It's like business this year. I've been out a bunch of times and brought in four deer, but it just doesn't feel the same. You worry if the deer in your truck is the one in 100 that has it [CWD]." The registration station two miles outside Black Earth was slow in the morning, the four stations set up to remove the deer heads empty much of the time. "It's still early in the morning but I'd assumed we'd have more by this time," said Craig Kopacek, station captain. "It's been such a strange season here in the eradication zone -- it's been real hard to predict what's going to happen on any one day. "On weekends, we've been right around 100 each day -- it would be nice to do twice that this weekend," he says. "But you have to remember we've been doing this for a couple of months now -- it might be getting old. There have been some people coming in with their 20th or 30th deer, which is great, we love to see it." Some of those people have been in so frequently to register their deer and have them sampled that they've memorized

their nine-digit hunter ID code. "Some hunters can rattle them off like their phone number," Kopacek said. But the hunters don't seem to be taking any joy in the hunt – it's pretty methodical. "People (hunters) don't like doing it. They really feel guilty about having deer go to waste." Inside the processing center at Black Earth, volunteer crews were still finishing up taking samples from the heads of deer killed earlier in the week in the eradication zone. "It's working really well – everything's running smoothly and we've had a lot of deer come through," said T.J. Whyte, a DNR wildlife management staffer with the wildlife health team and a station captain. "But we're still waiting to see what the gun deer season brings through." James Roberts of Madison brought a buck fawn in around 10:30 a.m. to the Black Earth registration station and reported a quiet day in the woods on his uncle's farm. "Usually on opening day, we'd have eight to nine people out there and I'm the only one hunting out there today." Roberts said he didn't see as many deer as in past years, nor hunters heading into the woods and fields. "The hunting pressure isn't there. You're not hearing as many shots." He had already shot a doe on his uncle's farm a couple of weeks ago, and said he came out opening day for the same reason: "I enjoy the outdoors. I enjoy hunting, and I'm behind the DNR eradication plan and strategy and I want to help out." Eric Whitney of Durango, Colo., was at the Black Earth registration station to report for the National Public Radio environmental show, "Living on Earth." He pondered why this story had attracted media from across the country and from abroad, and answered: "The whole human health question -- if TSE wasn't related to Mad Cow disease I don't think there'd be really as much interest. It's new, so there's novelty, and the numbers are so dramatic." For people who are not familiar with the hunting culture or with the deer herd, "people hear the state wants to kill 25,000 deer and that freaks some people out," Whitney said. "Also, there's the controversy that sprang up to DNR's plan, and the economic impact," he said, noting he'd sold a radio spot to a business show on that topic. By 3 p.m., more than 79 heads had been collected and the sample processing center was in full production, staffed by wildlife ecology students from UW-Madison, UW-Stevens Point, and UW-Platteville.

Dodge County

Beaver Dam – Raj Singh at the Citgo Station says registrations have been very slow. Only 17 deer were registered compared to a normal year of about 80 by this time. "I think fewer people are hunting this year, which is surprising because all the deer I have seen have been good-sized and 14 of the 17 were bucks."

Ashippun – Ralph Thadwick said they'd registered only 16 deer, down significantly from past years, but it was still mid-afternoon. "I've seen some really nice deer today including a 17- pointer, a huge, really big 10-pointer, a nice 9-pointer and a pretty good 8-pointer. The signs outside tell people where they can have CWD testing done nearby, but it's hard to say if people are going there for sampling."

Lebanon – Wally Maas registered 10 deer by 3:30 p.m., down somewhat from 34 registered opening day last year. The station reported one 1-pointer and a couple 9-pointers. Most people are taking their deer to the testing station in Rubicon for CWD testing after registration.

Grant County

Woodman – At the Whistle Stop, Cheryl Austin said registrations were pretty slow but it gets busier later. They'd registered 20 deer, about 50-50 bucks and does. When asked if she had heard any good stories from the hunt, she said "No, but all the deer will get stretched a little and the stories will get longer by the end of the night." She did not get a sense that many people were having their deer tested for CWD in this part of the county.

Patch Grove – Melanie Hoffman registered 55 deer by mid-afternoon, a few more bucks than does including a few big 10- and 11-pointers.

Dickeyville – Roger Droessler at The Bait and Tackle Shop registered 65 to 70 deer, which isn't high, but hunters will bring in more animals later because the hunting weather is so comfortable. One 14-year-old from Benton shot a 14-point buck on his relative's farm just outside of Dickeyville within the first half-hour of the season. "I told him to go home and never come out again, Droessler chuckled, "because it will likely never happen to him again. Droessler said about 75 percent of deer registered were bucks and hunters reported seeing several other big bucks afield. "These are big, big animals this year. I'd say the average has been an 8-point buck and a big animal. I've seen several really nice 10-pointers in addition to that 14-pointer." Droessler said that only 5-6 of the 65-70 hunters he'd spoken with expressed interest in testing their deer for CWD.

Muscoda – Emma Drone said they'd registered 40- 50 deer. Hunters reported seeing more bucks than does, which is a bit frustrating for those who need to take a doe before they can take a shot at a buck. A local 18-year-old hunter took just a dandy deer in Eagle Township in Richland County. Ms. Drone said the 12-pointer's antlers were so thick at the base that she couldn't even get her hand around it. Some hunters are choosing to have CWD testing done and know there are convenient test sites in nearby towns.

Green County

Monroe – The station registered four deer, three of which were does.

Juda – Jim Rackow registered about 20 deer of which six were bucks "The deer are all good and healthy and I'd eat every one of them that's been here. I'm not afraid of the CWD possibility one bit," Rackow said at his family sausage making business.

New Glarus – Pete Ott registered 47 deer, probably down almost 100 from last year, but it's a while to sunset when more deer will come in. He saw a nice 15-pointer, about 200 pounds. CWD testing going well with essentially no wait. Most people have been bringing in does and fawns as required to get an Earn-A-Buck permit in this area.

Iowa County

Arena – Heck's Farm Market registered about 75 deer today – a lot more does than bucks since this is Earn-A-Buck country. Some nice 8-10 point bucks were recorded today, though earlier in the special season some really massive 13-14-pointers were registered, all in the two- to three-year old class. When asked how long the wait was for CWD testing, Eric reported, "Heck, it often takes them longer to get all the paperwork done then to age the deer, sample it and get the tissue ready for the lab. The deer handlers are getting quite skilled at this sampling."

Arena - Opening hunting conditions were termed beautiful, sunny and not too cold. John Weiland, a hunter from Brick, N.J., brought in 10 deer shortly after noon to the Arena sampling station. He is part of a group of eight hunters that have been coming to the Spring Green area on and off for eight years. Weiland called hunting conditions Saturday morning, "Fabulous, beautiful scenery and saw a lot of deer." Weiland and his party took nine antlerless deer and one, "big, very old buck." He said he and his party would keep all the deer except the "tough old buck" and would butcher them according to Agriculture guidelines Saturday afternoon. Weiland commented that Wisconsin was very fortunate to have the deer herd and hunting opportunities it does, and he said he wanted to tell Wisconsin hunters to, "Get out and hunt. Now is the time to do your job as a conservationist if you value keeping hunting as a tradition. Do what you have to do -- especially if you are from Wisconsin," he said. Proud Father Troy Ringelstetter had three young hunters in their party of nine. Two did very well. David Schrosfer, 14, got a 10-point buck. Justin Schell, 13, took a very large doe. Ringelstetter's son Austin, 11, just graduated from hunter education class. The rest of the party registered the deer at lunch and they intended to go back out, buck tags in hand. They hunt in Sauk Co. near the river, and all are from Sauk City. They said they intended to keep the venison and enjoy it. Said Ringelstetter, "Hunters should hunt deer and listen for every scrap of information they can about CWD and then analyze and make a decision for themselves on using the meat."

Barneveld -- DNR staffer Greg Matthews reported, "It's been fairly busy. We've done probably 75-80 deer by noon. The weather has been beautiful and sunny. We've received a lot of reports that more shooting has occurred today than any other day since the season began here Oct. 24 so we are expecting to have a lot of deer come in after 4 o'clock. Roughly 50 percent of the hunters are keeping their deer. We're not getting a lot of bucks here in Barneveld. We're getting mainly does but it's quite common for people to bring in truckloads – 3 or 4 deer." At Barneveld, DNR Secretary Darrell Bazzell was cutting heads for CWD samples and said activity was steady by mid-afternoon. "I think we have more than 120 heads already. Hunters are very cooperative." Bazzell said he had been out hunting early, and his hunting party had taken eight deer, but he had to pass on two very nice bucks because he hadn't yet had an earn-a-buck tag.

Jefferson County

Fort Atkinson – Chuck Letzow registered 29 deer of which 10 were bucks including a 10- and 11-pointer. So far the number of deer seen seems way down, observed Mr. Letzow.

Watertown – Julie Henze registered 25 deer by midafternoon, including one good wide-bodied buck. As to hearing any good hunting stories today, she said, "You know, all the stories kind of run together including the ones about the deer you could have gotten, but didn't."

Lafayette County

South Wayne – The processing station has registered 75 deer, including about 30 bucks. The consensus here is that the opening day harvest is much lower than previous years," said the DNR's Teague Prichard. They usually take 100-300 deer here opening day. About 85 percent of the hunters were having their deer sampled and tested for CWD.

New Diggings – Bob Anton registered eight deer, of which two were bucks. Hunting seems way down compared to last year when 25 deer had been registered at that time. Hunters seem most upset about the amount of time it takes to get results back from the CWD testing. "Waiting 6-8 weeks or more seems like a long time to many people."

Rock County

Edgerton -- Forty deer were registered. "Deer were coming in steady all morning," Ann Bekta said. "We had a lull around 1:00 p.m. which we attribute to the Badger football game, but things are picking up again."

(more)

Sauk County

Baraboo – More than 150 deer were registered at Viking Express II by 5 p.m. of which 83 were sampled for CWD. "Deer have been coming in steady all day," said Sheila Ballweg of the DNR.

Sauk City – Registrations were slow opening day, says Wayne Whitemarsh at Ace Hardware. By late afternoon, only 100 deer were registered. "Normally we register 500 a day for the opening weekend," Whitemarsh, said. "Our license sales have been brisk this week, but you would never guess it by the hunter turnout." One hunter who visited the store told Whitemarsh that he found four headless deer carcasses on his property. Apparently the carcasses were gutted and dumped there many days ago. The incident was relayed to a local game warden.

WEST CENTRAL REGION

Adams County

Wisconsin Dells - At the Corner Pump, owner Kay Theisen reported registering about 100 deer by 2 p.m. "We've had a lot of nice bucks. I've done this a long time and I think the deer coming in are nicer than usual. We just had one in that was a 12-pointer." The establishment also had a collection station, and it was busy with hunters willing to donate their deer head for testing. "The ones that have really nice antlers don't want to lose their deer heads but they're (samplers) not having trouble – people are real cooperative about it," Theisen said. She said she wasn't hearing a lot of talk about CWD. "Most of it is comments that their wife won't eat the deer but they don't seem too concerned about it in our area." At Wisconsin Dells, Rita Harnack said that hunters are endorsing the CWD program. "Everyone is being very supportive and going out of the way to donate." She said that before noon 70 deer were registered and 24 heads donated at the station. Harnack said she had seen "just a ton of bucks..."

Buffalo County

Mondovi - At Gary's Shop Kwik, owner Gary Norrish reported registering 65 to 70 deer by 2:15 p.m. "That's probably pretty good seeing it's not 70 degrees. We normally don't get many coming in early in the day when it's that cool out. We get bombarded at 6 o'clock or so." Last year, on opening day, his station registered 352, down slightly from 417 the year before. This year, as typical, they've seen a lot of nice bucks. Dave Linderud, DNR wildlife biologist for Buffalo and Trempealeau Counties, set up a collection site at Gary's Shop Kwik when traffic was slow at the original collection site a few blocks away. "We really were busy up to now. Hunters are willing to do the testing right here, but are not interested in going too far to do it any place else." Linderud said he wasn't getting many questions about CWD. "Most people are comfortable with it. They think their deer are healthy. Many of them, we almost have to talk them into getting the deer tested. We tell them even though they're comfortable with the deer, other people aren't. Getting their deer tested will help ease the fear of some of those people" if the tests for Buffalo County come back negative.

Chippewa County

Stanley - Kathy Kuester, owner of Otter Lake Bait, reported that registration at 2:30 p.m. was running ahead of last year. "I think it's up -- in fact, quite up. We just did an estimate and I think I have 70-some deer. We're just a little store in the country, so that's good. We have a lot that will come in after 3 p.m." Kuester said mostly bucks were coming in. People don't seem to be really worried about CWD and many weren't interested in having their deer tested. "There's a few that would said they would get it tested. Others said they weren't worried about all." She noted that one guy brought one deer in that didn't look good. He said the liver was black and he didn't want it. We told him to go to the bowling alley and they'd test it for him."

Clark County

Owen - Gail Muehlbauer at Owen Sports and Liquor reported registrations up a little bit over last year. "It was slow this morning but this afternoon they've been bringing them in. We've got 120 right now. We're getting some very nice looking bucks." Muehlbauer had the pleasure of watching three youngsters bring in their first bucks. Brandon Lulloff of Curtis got a 10-point buck. "He was just very excited -- he outdid his uncles. Nick Barna of Withee brought in an 8-point buck. His was a first time buck too. Jessica Zarins of Thorp, got her first buck, a 9 pointer. She was very excited. This one got past her dad." The store was also a testing station; as of 2:30 p.m., they had collected for testing about 30 heads. Muehlbauer hadn't heard much talk among hunters of CWD. "In this area, we don't seem to have any problem with it. Guys do not seem to be worried about it. As for our license sales, we're fine here. Our license sales were even up a little bit."

Neillsville - At the Bread & Butter registration station, lots of bucks were being brought into the station mid-day, biologists said. Hunters reporting to the station said they'd seen deer and had a good season.

Crawford County

Prairie du Chien - Biologist John Nelson said hunters are having a successful season. "They seem to be pretty happy. It's a pretty good day as far as weather goes."

(more)

Dunn County

Biologist John Cole said hunters reported "having a good time," but that really windy conditions caused problems in some areas. He said too few hunters were donating samples to the deer testing program.

Ridgeland - At the Cenex Convenience Store, store manager Tay Moen reported steady registrations. "It seems the same to me. We had one first-time buck, a 10 point. He (the hunter) was happy as a lark." The store is also a testing station, and Moen reports that people "have been nice and happy and friendly. We just ask them if they're willing to get tested, yes or no, and they're (DNR) just about up to their quota." Chad Mogen, a DNR wildlife technician and biologist collecting deer heads for testing, said sampling "has been positive all along. The only negative is we're getting the same township... We're doing 20 a township for Dunn County and we're well on our way for that in the two townships." Mogen said the collection station is along a major highway, and that people are stopping if it's on their way. "They're not driving out of their way to come here. If we're going to want to get the samples we're going to have to go get them." "I think people up here are pretty proactive. They want the stuff to get tested. They want them tested and they want to find out. There have been people waiting in line to get them done. Even after they get registered, they hang out and wait, even though they may have to wait 20 minutes.

Eau Claire County

Fall Creek - At Grunewald's Locker, Jim Grunewald said registration was slow. "It's down from last year. I registered maybe 40 so far. I usually register a lot more than that. I think this disease that they got, that's shutting people off from getting them. I think that's the main factor. The men aren't that bad but the women don't want it in the house." Grunewald said the deer coming in all look good.

Jackson County

In Jackson County Michelle Windsor, DNR biologist, said a steady stream of hunters was registering deer and many were donating heads to the CWD testing program.

Alma Center - At the A.C. Locker Co., owner Barb Comstock said registrations – and orders for deer processing – were down about half from last year. "The hunters said it's kind of sparse out there." She wasn't sure the reason for the downturn, given the "perfect" weather, but didn't think concern over CWD was to blame. "As a matter of fact, we are doing testing here and half of the hunters don't even want to bother, so I don't think that (CWD) is the problem. The only hunters I have talked about it are all positive, they aren't worried about it."

Juneau County

Warden Tim Lawhern reported opening hunting conditions were clear, crisp and pleasant. Seeing a lot of hunters and hearing a lot of shots.

Camp Douglas - At 3:30 p.m., Lynnetta Eisfeldt at the Travel Mart reported 49 bucks and six does, including a 10-point buck a woman was registering right then. Eisfeldt, in her first year helping to register, said her colleagues reported a slower than normal number of deer coming in on a sunny, windy day. Hunters didn't seem to be concerned about CWD.

La Crosse County

West Salem - Jessie Bentzen at Karl's Sport Shop reported a steady stream of hunters at 3:30 p.m. "We've had about 80 to 85 in now," including a deer with an unusual rack known as a "downtine." Bucks were running ahead of does, and hunters were reporting a quiet day. "We've got the brisk wind going on."

DNR was testing deer 200 feet away, and at 1 p.m. had about 18 heads, Bentzen says. CWD seems to be a concern. "I think they have a lot of questions," she says.

West Salem - Opening hunting conditions were very good, with sun and temperatures warming through the 30s, but there was a strong breeze. Early in the day collections were slow -- about 13 samples by lunch -- because hunters appeared to be staying out in the woods. One deer collected at the station appeared to have been wounded some time ago and clearly had a wound infection; the hunter was given a replacement tag and he headed back out to the woods. Near the collection site at Karl's Sports, 66 deer were registered by 2 p.m., 38 of them bucks.

Marathon County

Elderon - Elderon did itself proud on opening day. Residents Mark Woyak harvested a 10-point deer with a 17 3/8 inch spread and David Starr recorded a 17-inch spread on a 9-point deer, according to Ronald Breitrick, registration officer at Mama's Place in Elderon. TJ Milanowski brought in a deer with an 18-inch spread with six points, and a lot of 15 inch spreads came in. At 3:45 p.m. hunters had brought in 48 bucks and 12 does, and Breitrick expected more to start coming in after 5:30 p.m. "We're about even, maybe just a hair ahead," he said. Apparently, CWD was not much of a concern; one of the 60 hunters coming in to the registration station went to the testing site. "The rest of them said, "We're not worried about that."

(more)

Monroe County

Kendall - Staff at Angie's Call of the Wild reported 58 deer registered at 4 p.m., a little more than half bucks, and some 8-pointers.

Pepin County

Pepin - At the Third Base Bar, Diyona Schmillen was marking her 17th season of registering deer. "So far we're still down -- I'd say by quite a few. In 1999, we registered 199 opening day, in 2000, we registered 276, in 2001, it was 148. Right now I'm sitting at 37. The deer aren't there is what I hear from a lot of people. Today I had a nice big 15 come in. I've had a couple of nice eights, a nice 10-pointer. Through other hunters, I've heard I have some 9- and 10-pointers coming in yet." She takes photos of the hunters that harvest big deer, and hunters getting their first buck. So far, she has number of pictures of nice bucks but no first-timers. Schmillen expected the count to pick up as the evening wears on. CWD wasn't much of a concern, she said. "It's mostly the women that are worried about it."

Pierce County

Ellsworth - At the Speedway Super America, DNR wildlife technician Mike Soerges said registrations were starting to pick up around 4:30 p.m. "I think it's a little bit down, a little slow. I'm guessing it's because it's cooler and people aren't rushing in like they did the last couple of years. Most guys are telling me it's been slow. They're not seeing a lot of deer or a lot of people. We usually get big deer out of this station. They haven't shown up yet." The station was also collecting deer heads for sampling. "We're getting a few guys that aren't interested (in the testing) for various reasons, mainly because they don't think it's a problem," Soerges said. "But we're getting a lot of cooperation." Despite cooperation, Soerges said he'd be lucky if he got half of the 15-20 quota per township of samples he needed for the weekend.

Portage County

Almond - "I've got about 20 guys in here right now," said Greg Swan at 4:35 p.m. as he manned the registration station at Swan Oil. An hour later, he reported having registered thus far on opening day eight bucks and three does. Normally, he has 50 to 60 deer. "Some of the guys I've talked to tonight say they haven't seen any deer. Personally, I think there's a lot of deer out there. Other guys who usually hunt aren't hunting. CWD -- that is entirely it. That threw a stinker into this whole thing. I would say five of the eight bucks at least 17-18-inch spreads."

St. Croix County

Burkhardt - Hunting conditions were termed "beautiful," with sun, breeze and temperatures in the 20s. No tracking snow. Hunters were there and waiting to volunteer deer head samples when collection station personnel arrived about 9 a.m. Hunters reported seeing deer and hearing a lot of shots taken. Hunters reported heavy hunting activity at nearby Willow River State Park.

Trempealeau County

Trempealeau - At Hungry Point, Teenie Sonsalla had just registered her third deer of the day around 4:30 p.m., counting among them a nice 10-point buck, a nubbin buck, and a spike horn buck. "It's low -- usually I've got at least two tags by noon. Centerville had 33, and even the Stop and Shop, which is usually the busiest, had 38. They're usually around 100. Do I think its Chronic Wasting? No, I think they're not seeing any deer." CWD "is not the scare out there that it was in the beginning," Sonsalla says. "I think a lot of guys have done some research. They're tool and die by day, and at night they're on the Internet." As a result, "everybody's hunting as usual. They are using precautions when doing the field dressing, staying away from bones, I know some of them have actually gutted deer with rubber gloves."

Vernon County

Hillsboro - Kay Stockwell, who owns Al's Garage with her husband Arthur, was registering deer for the 31st gun-deer season and shaking her head over this season. "Nobody seems really enthused," she said. And at 5 p.m., she had registered 104 deer. "Usually we have 300-some." She's not sure why the numbers are down -- concern over CWD perhaps, or the troubled economy. The station had a lot of nice bucks coming in, including some nice 10-pointers, perhaps one of them destined to be a birthday offering: the hunter's wife was celebrating her birthday.

Wood County

Mead Wildlife Area - Brian Peters, biologist at Mead Wildlife Area near Marshfield, said that hunters have kept registration and sampling staff "steadily busy." He said that hunters are reporting success, registering deer, and that 90 percent are donating deer heads. "I haven't heard any complaints. They're pretty satisfied," he said.